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Equal Rights Petition, 1870

Multiple copies of this petition were signed and submitted to the General Assembly. It passed the Senate in 1884, but it was then tabled. In 1885, it was brought to the House of Representatives where it passed it unanimously.

To the Hon. General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island, at its January Session, A.D. 1870.

The undersigned, citizens of Rhode Island, respectfully ask your Hon. body to pass a law making it a penal offence for individuals or corporations to make any distinction or discrimination on account of color or race of persons in a licensed inn, theater, or other place of amusement, saloon, barber shop, public conveyance or public meeting or any other place where people congregate.

[Many versions of this petition were circulated, signed by hundreds of supporters, and submitted to the General Assembly. The second signer to this one was Mahlon Van Horne who went on to be the first African American elected to the General Assembly in 1885. Note that the petition was also signed by many women. Although they did not have the right to vote in 1870, they still found ways to express their political views.]

This primary source comes from the Rhode Island State Archives, Petitions Received, 1725-1890, C#00165.

